

COMIC RELIEF

calvin and hobbes one last ride down the hill

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calvin and hobbes

1985-1995

The creator of Calvin and Hobbes speaks out on the nature of art, the process of creation, and why he's ending the most popular comic strip of all time.

BY BILL WATTERSON

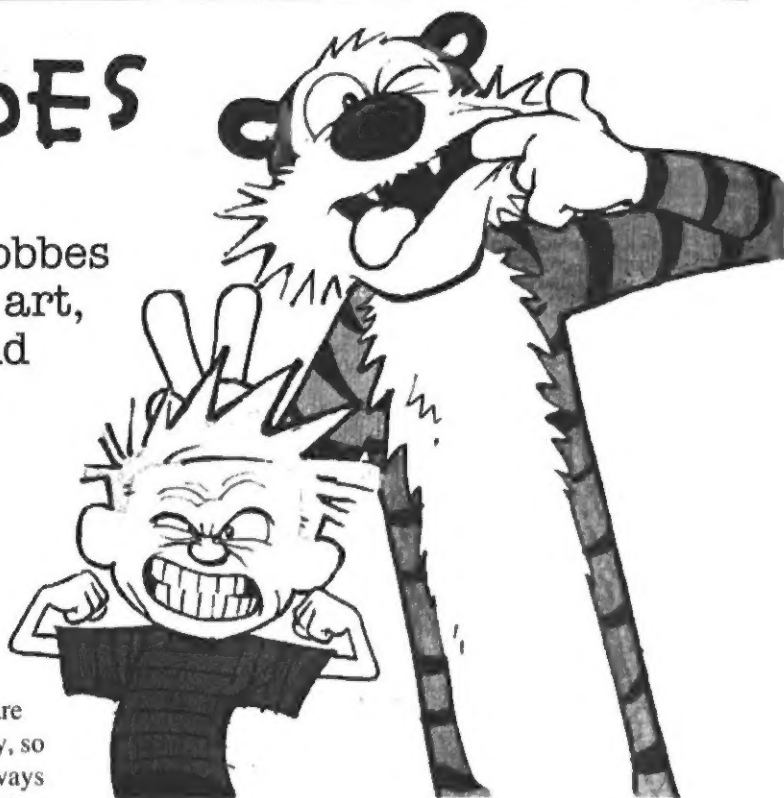
Watterson on Cartooning

I don't think of comics as just entertainment. It's a rare privilege to be able to talk to millions of people on a given day, so I'm eager to say something meaningful when I can. There is always pressure to write some snappy one-liner that will buy me another twenty-four hours of lead time on deadlines, but nothing depresses me like thinking I've become a joke factory to fill newspaper space. Whenever possible, I use the strip to talk about the things that are important to me.

I think the best comics (like the best novels, paintings, etc.) are personal, idiosyncratic works that reflect a unique and honest sensibility. To attract and keep an audience, art must entertain, but the significance of any art lies in its ability to express truths - to reveal and help us understand our world. Comic strips, in their own humble way, are capable of doing this.

The best comics expose human nature and help us laugh at our own stupidity and hypocrisy. They indulge in exaggeration and absurdity, helping us to see the world with fresh eyes and reminding us how important it is to play and be silly. Comics depict the ordinary, mundane events of our lives and help us remember the importance of tiny moments. They cleverly sum up our unexpressed thoughts and emotions. Sometimes they show the world from the perspective of children and animals, encouraging us to be innocent for a moment.

The best comics, that is to say, are fun house mirrors that distort appearances only to help us recognize, and laugh at, our

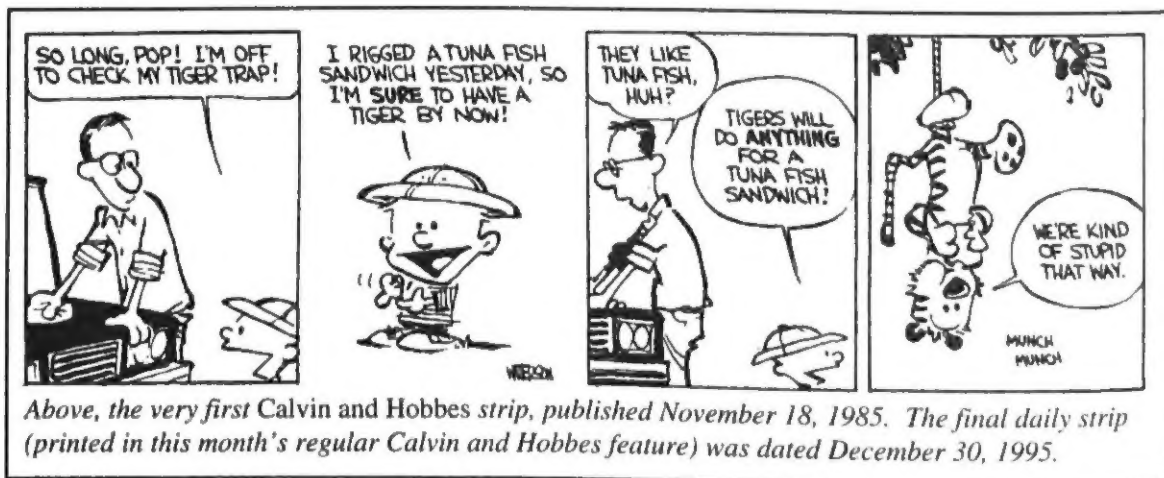


essential characteristics.

Watterson on the Process

I think I learned to be a writer so I could draw for a living. Actually, I enjoy writing as much as drawing, but working on a deadline, the drawing is easier and faster.

People always ask how cartoonists come up with



Above, the very first Calvin and Hobbes strip, published November 18, 1985. The final daily strip (printed in this month's regular Calvin and Hobbes feature) was dated December 30, 1995.

ideas, and the answer is so boring that we're usually tempted to make up something sarcastic. The truth is, we hold a blank sheet of paper, stare into space, and let our minds wander. (To the layman, this looks remarkably like goofing off.) When something interests us, we play around with it. Sometimes this yields a funny observation; sometimes it doesn't, but that's about all there is to it. Once in

a while the cartoonist will find himself in a beam of light and angels will appear with a great idea, but not often.

Occasionally I'll have a subject or issue in mind that I want to talk about, but if I don't have a ready topic, I try to think of what I'd like to draw. My goal is to feel enthusiastic about some aspect of the work. I think one can always tell when an artist is engaged and having a good time: the energy and life comes through in the work.

I like to sit outside when I write, partly because it seems less like a job that way, and partly because there are bugs and birds and rocks around that may suggest an idea. I never know what will trigger a workable idea, so my writing schedule varies a great deal. Sometimes I can write several strips in an afternoon; sometimes I can't write anything at all. I never know if another hour sitting there will be wasted time or the most productive hour of the day.

When I come up with a topic, I look at it through Calvin's eyes. Calvin's personality dictates a range of possible reactions to any subject, so I just tag along and see what he does.

The truth of the matter is that my characters write their own material. I put them in situations and listen to them. A line for Hobbes never works for Calvin or Susie, because Hobbes reacts differently and he expresses himself in a different voice. Virtually all the strip's humor comes from the characters' personalities: I would never think of Calvin's retort if Calvin weren't the one saying it.

From "The Calvin and Hobbes Twentieth Anniversary Book" by Bill Watterson. ©1995 Bill Watterson. Reprinted with permission of Andrews and McMeel.

The Final Strip

Comic Relief, along with all of the newspapers and magazines that published Calvin and Hobbes, received the following letter from Bill Watterson in November, 1995:

Dear Comic Relief Editor,
I will be stopping Calvin and Hobbes at the end of the year. This was not a

The Cast



Calvin is named for a sixteenth-century theologian who believed in predestination. Most people assume that Calvin is based on a son of mine, or based on detailed memories of my own childhood. In fact, I don't have children, and I was a fairly quiet, obedient kid - almost Calvin's opposite. One of the reasons that Calvin's character is fun to write is that I often don't agree with him.



Hobbes is named after a seventeenth-century philosopher with a dim view of human nature. Hobbes has the patient dignity and common sense of most animals I've met. Hobbes was very much inspired by one of our cats, a gray tabby named Sprite. Sprite not only provided the long body and facial characteristics for Hobbes, she also was the model for his personality. She was good-natured, intelligent, friendly, and enthusiastic in a sneaking-up-and-pouncing sort of way. Sprite suggested the idea of Hobbes greeting Calvin at the door in midair at high velocity.

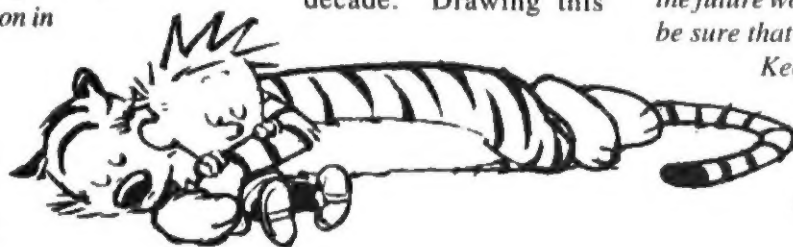
recent or easy decision, and I leave with some sadness. My interests have shifted, however, and I believe I've done what I can do within the constraints of daily deadlines and small panels. I am eager to work at a more thoughtful pace, with fewer artistic compromises. I have not yet decided on future projects. That so many newspapers would carry Calvin and Hobbes is an honor I'll long be proud of, and I've greatly appreciated your support and indulgence over the past decade. Drawing this

comic strip has been a privilege and a pleasure, and I thank you for giving me the opportunity.

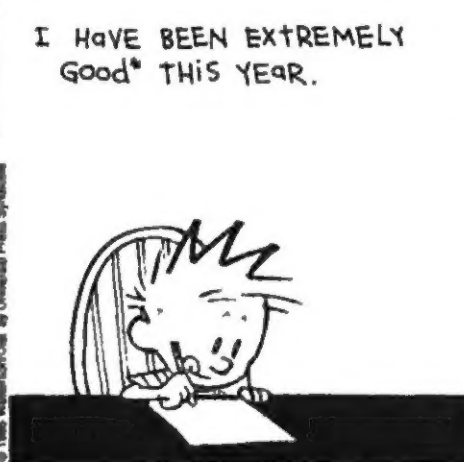
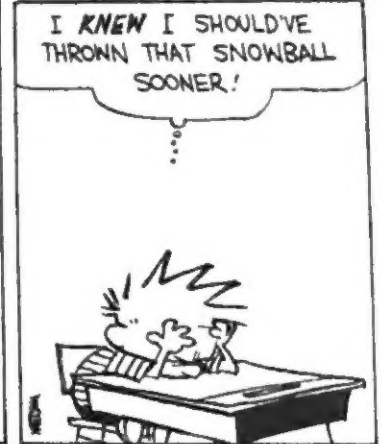
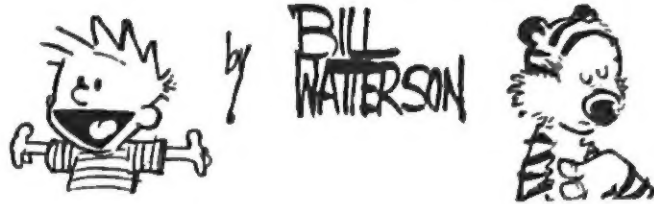
Sincerely,
Bill Watterson

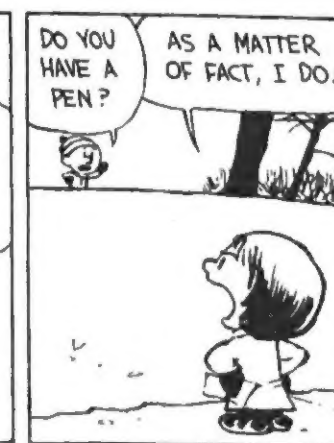
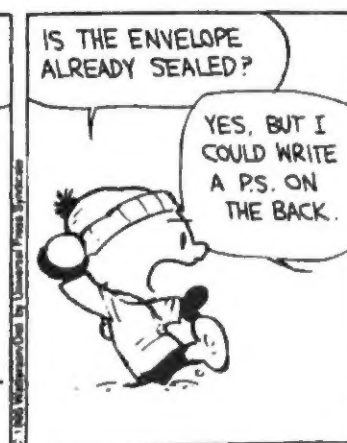
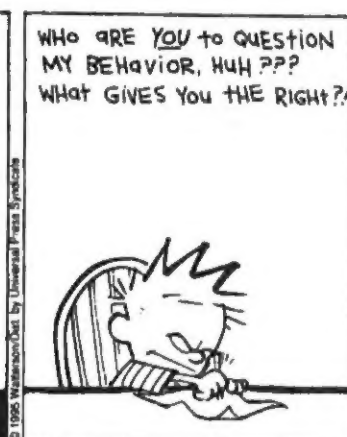
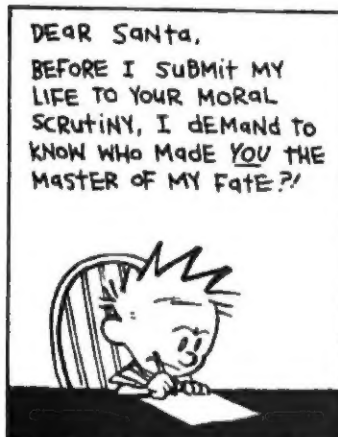
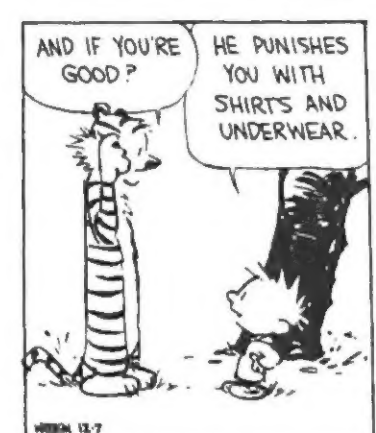
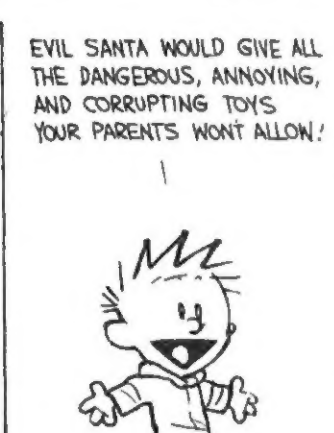
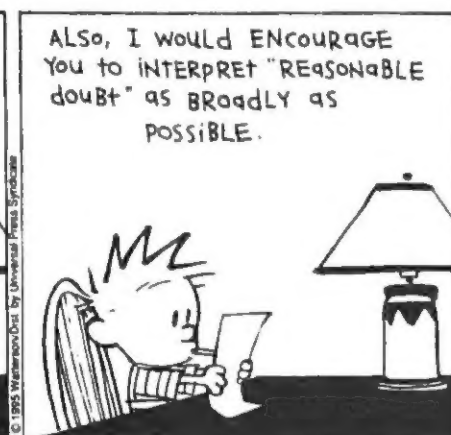
Calvin and Hobbes has been a staple in Comic Relief for the past seven years and we'll all miss Bill's unique window on the world and on human nature. If the opportunity arises for Comic Relief to bring you the future work of Bill Watterson, you can be sure that we will take it.

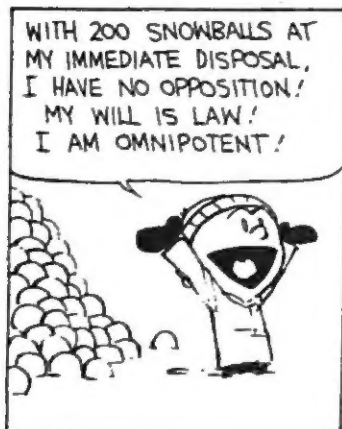
Keep watching these pages for new and exciting cartooning talents. Remember, in 1984 no one had heard of Bill either.

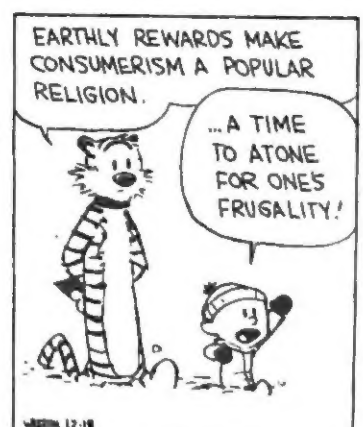
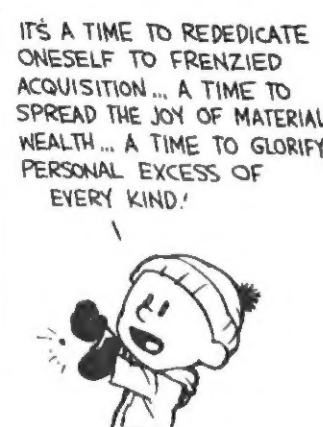
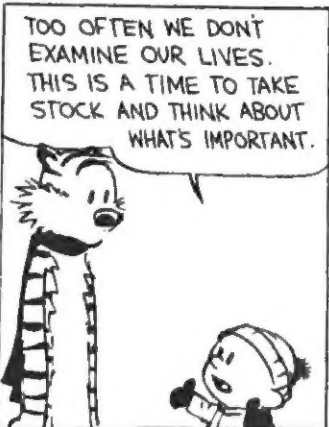
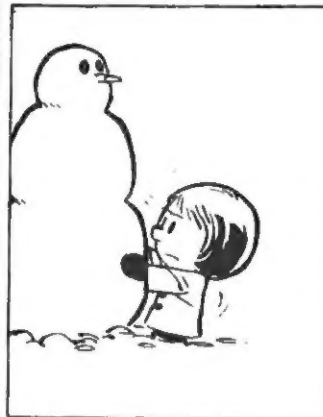


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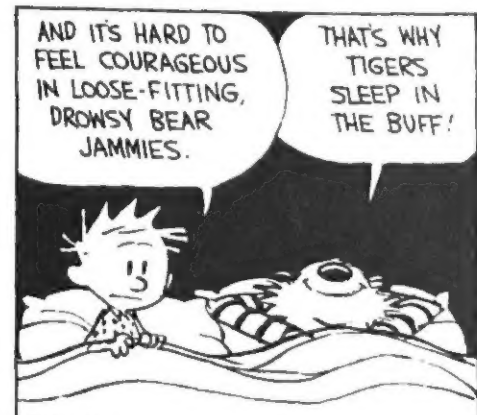
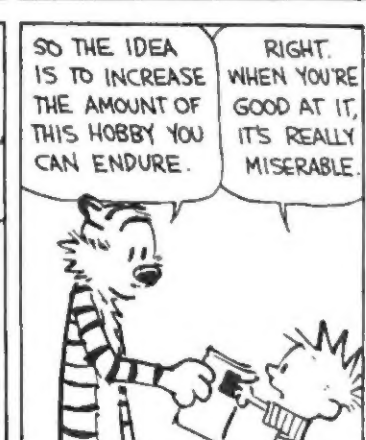
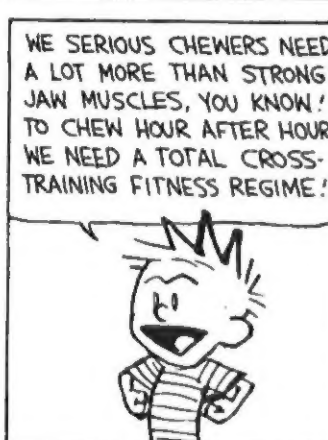
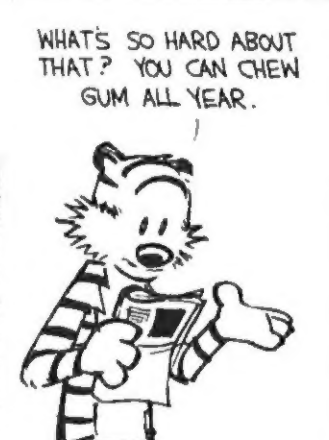
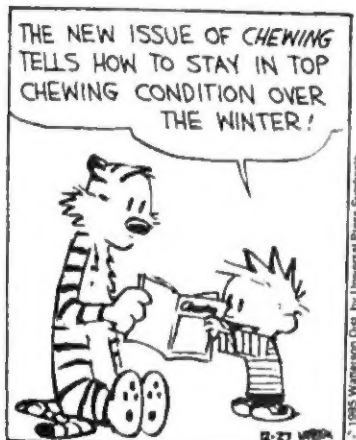
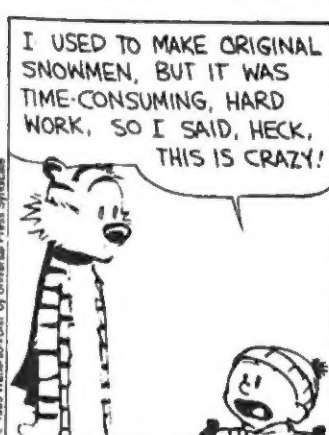
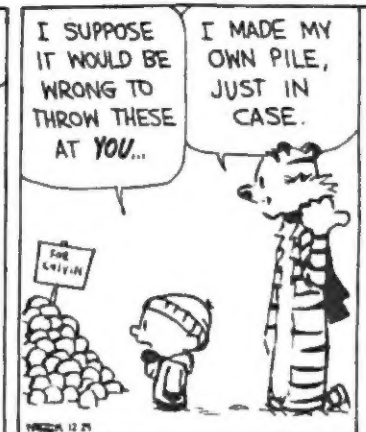














CALVIN AND HOBBS
SOON TO RETIRE..

..LET'S GO
AND WATCH
TV!

..HA HA!
NO MORE
SCHOOL... EVER!



APLOGIES TO WATSON... AND THANKS FOR THE LAUGHS-

